OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM PRAY FOR US

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This little book is dedicated

in affectionate gratitude to

Sir WILLIAM MILNER, Bt.

by whose generosity

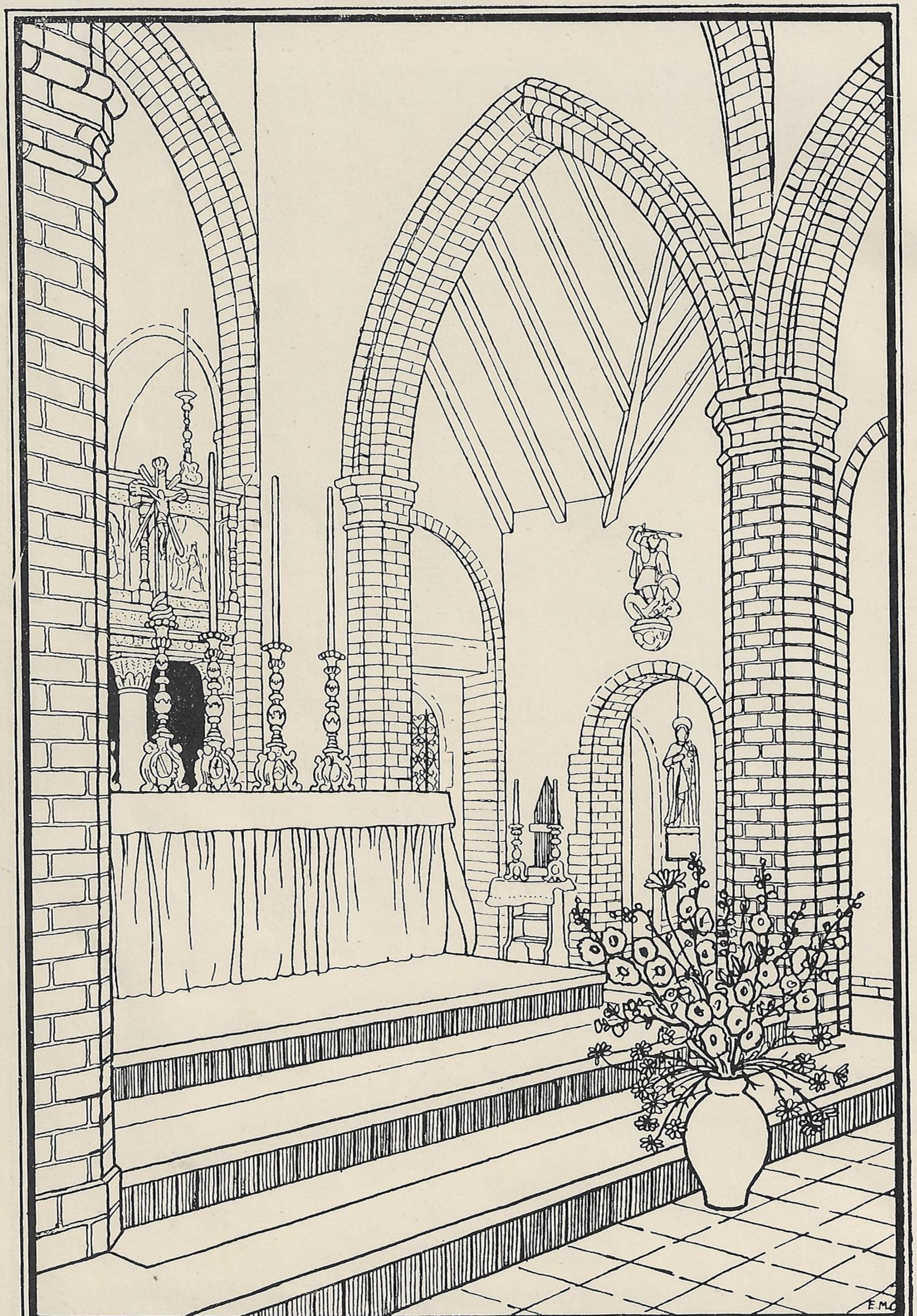
in giving the site, upon which the

ancient foundations have been rediscovered

it was made possible to restore the

Holy House

and erect the Pilgrimage Church.



High Altar of the Pilgrimage Church.

England's National Shrine of Our Lady Past and Present

by

A. HOPE PATTEN

Administrator of the Shrine

Drawings by

ENID M. CHADWICK

SECOND EDITION

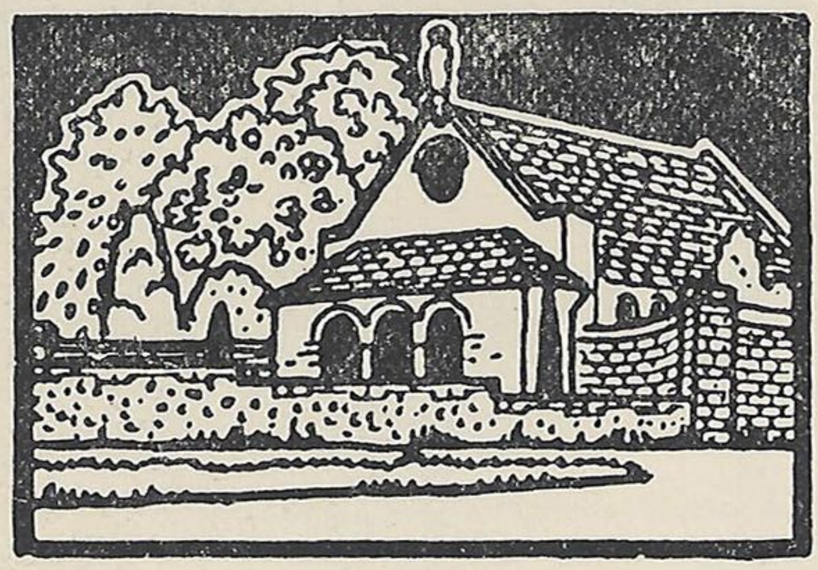
A Walsingham Book

Price 1/6

ENGLAND'S NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY

PAST AND PRESENT

By A. HOPE PATTEN

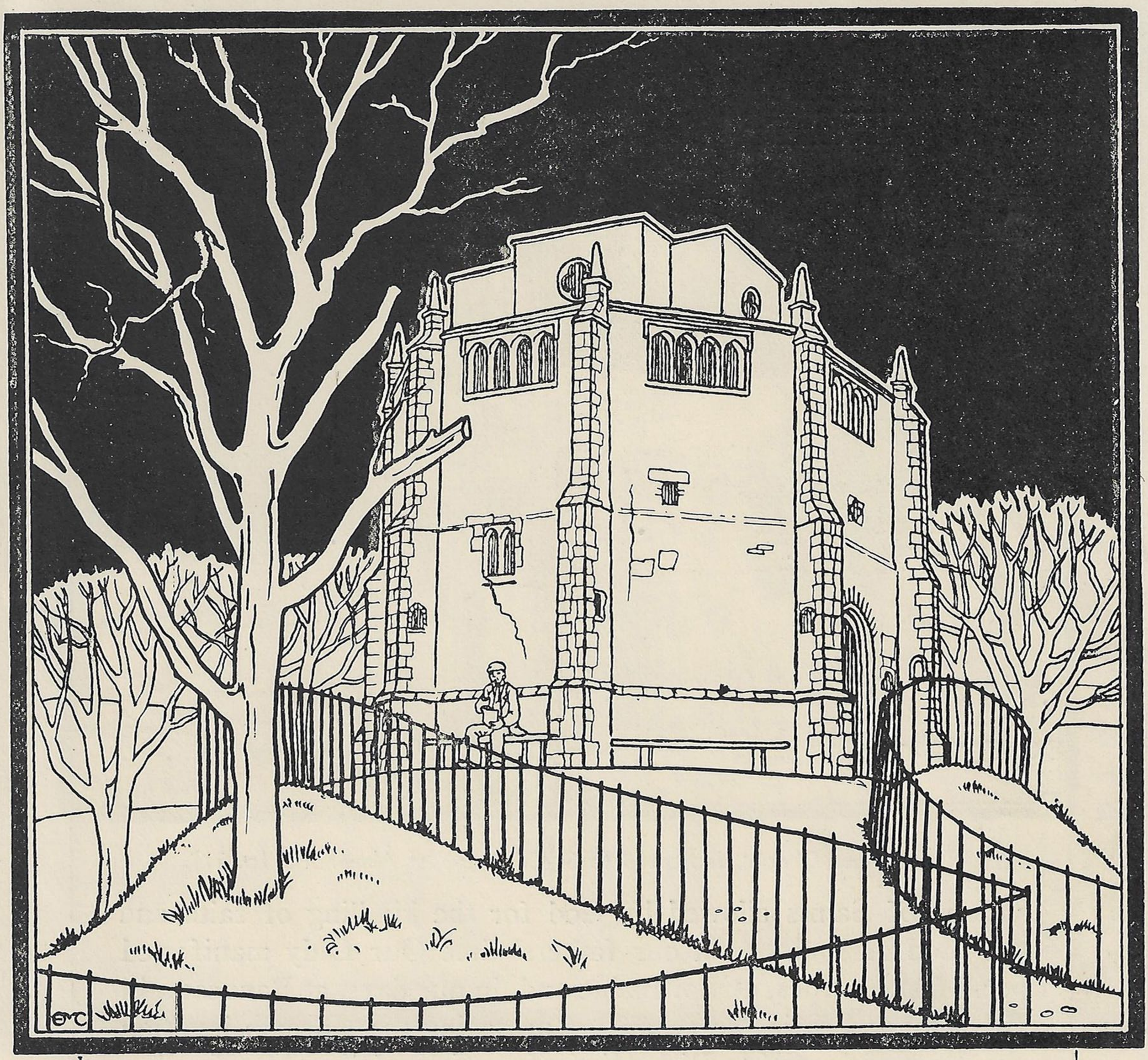


IT was built in the fields not far from the river—the stream which gives its name to the whole valley from the sea to the low hills not far from Fakenham. So near indeed to the Stiffkey did Richeldis rear the Chapel in honour of Our Lady that at high tide the water must have almost lapped its very walls.

Such a small building to attract so many pilgrims, for it was only twenty-three feet six long and twelve feet eleven wide; that is, if William of Worcester who paced it in the fifteenth century was exact, but he has been found at times to have been wide of the mark and feet out in his reckoning.

But after all size is no matter, and most of the Holy Places of Christendom are small. The cave of the Nativity at Bethlehem, the hill of Calvary, and so too the site of the house of Mary before the entrance to the cave of the Annunciation of Nazareth. Indeed the chapel built in the fields at Walsingham was believed to be a copy of that very house at Nazareth where the Blessed Virgin lived before, and at the time of. the Incarnation of the Son of God, when she became verily and indeed the Mother of God: the same cottage in which she lived with her Divine Son and her spouse St. Joseph.

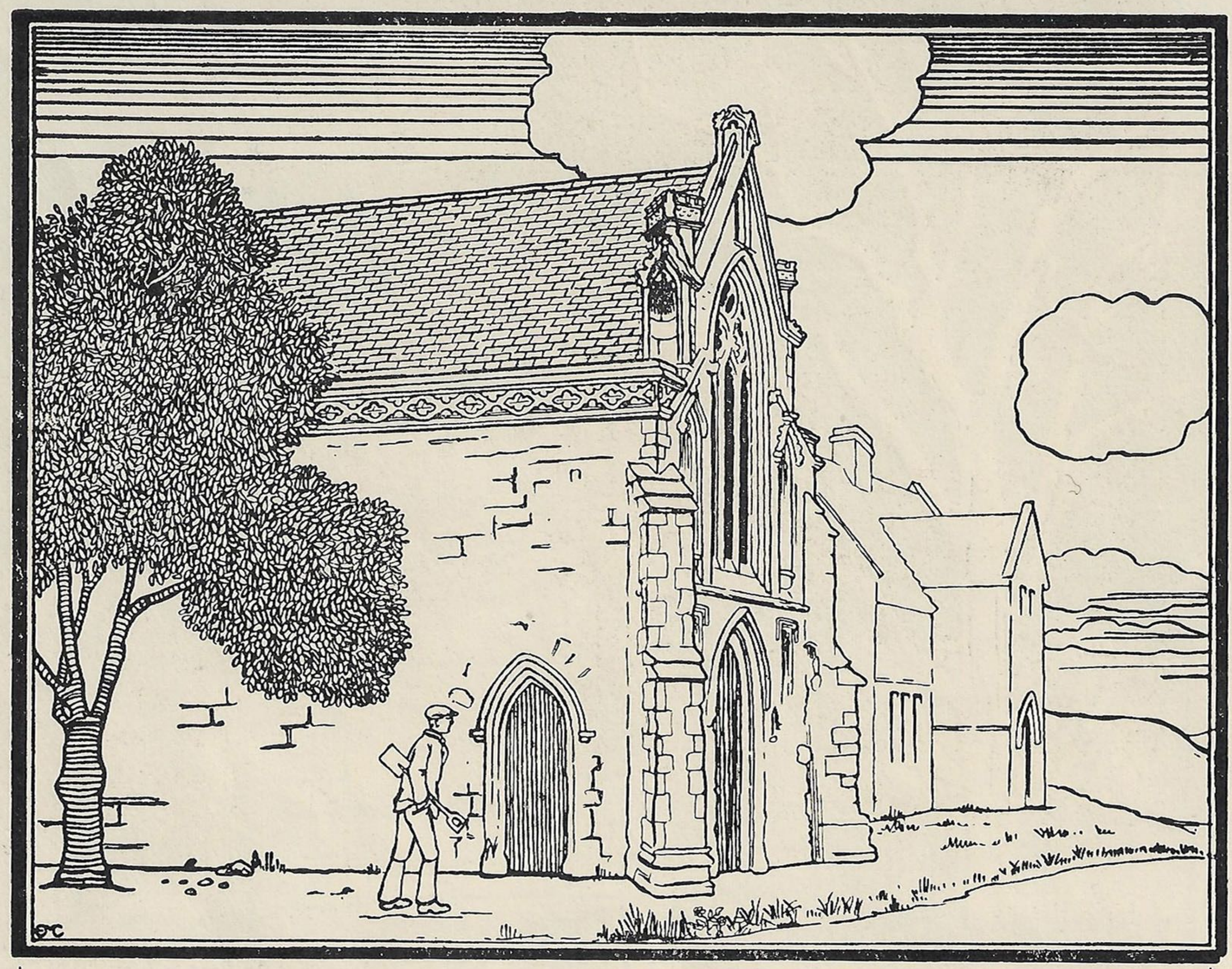
It was partly owing to this similarity to the actual house of the Incarnation that thousands were drawn to Walsingham in the eleventh and subsequent centuries, and because of this claim it was known throughout Europe as "England's Nazareth," the house of the Immaculate Virgin, built in the remote and almost inaccessible fastnesses of the North Folk.



The Chapel of the Red Mount at King's Lynn (p. 31).

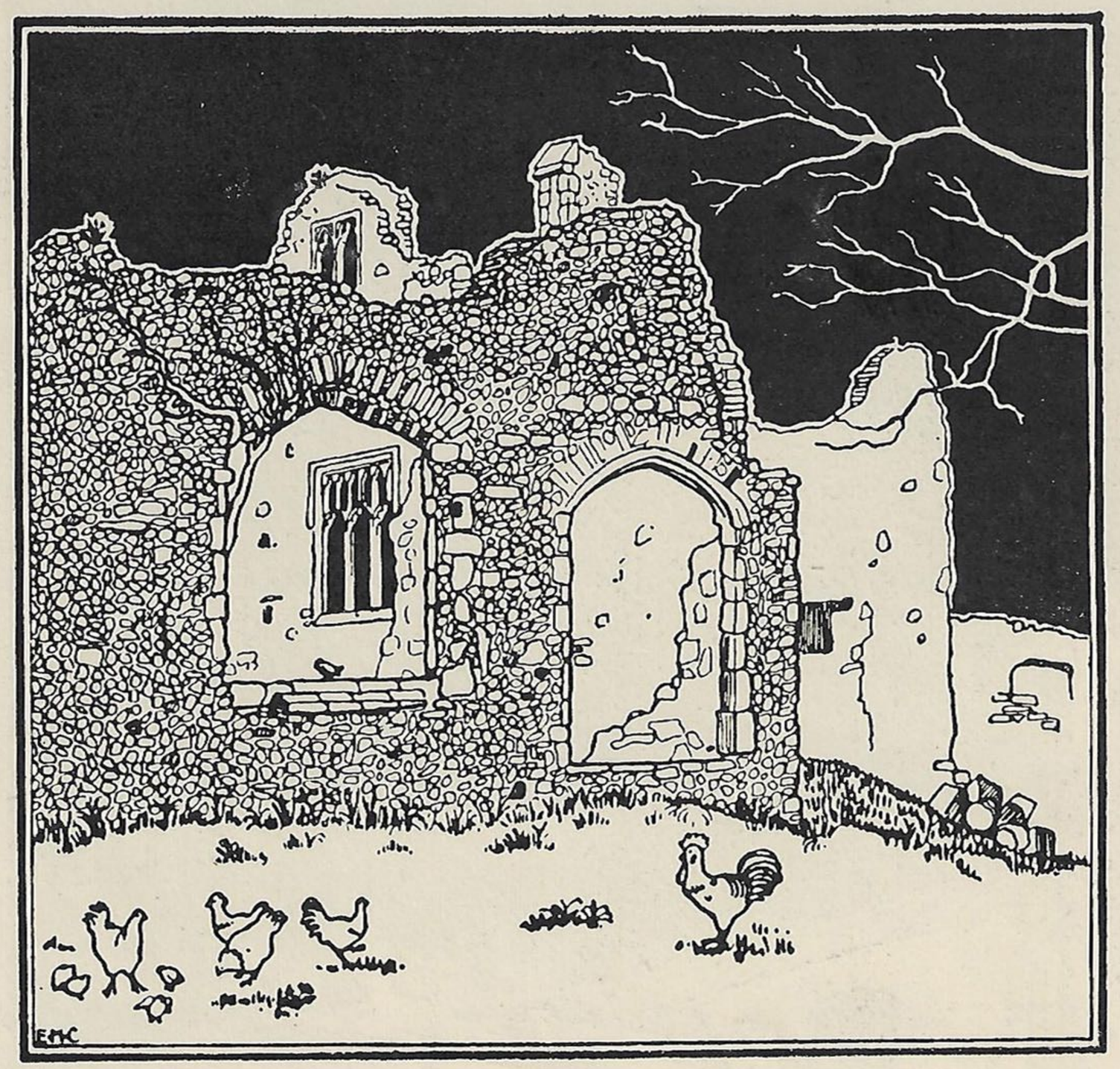
But it is not only on account of its similarity to the home of the Holy Family in Nazareth that the pious of the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, early sixteenth and twentieth centuries seek that spot, for was it not built, as our forefathers held, at the personal request of Our Lady herself?

The religious history of most countries has records of the



The Slipper Chapel dedicated to S. Catherine of Alexandria (p. 31).

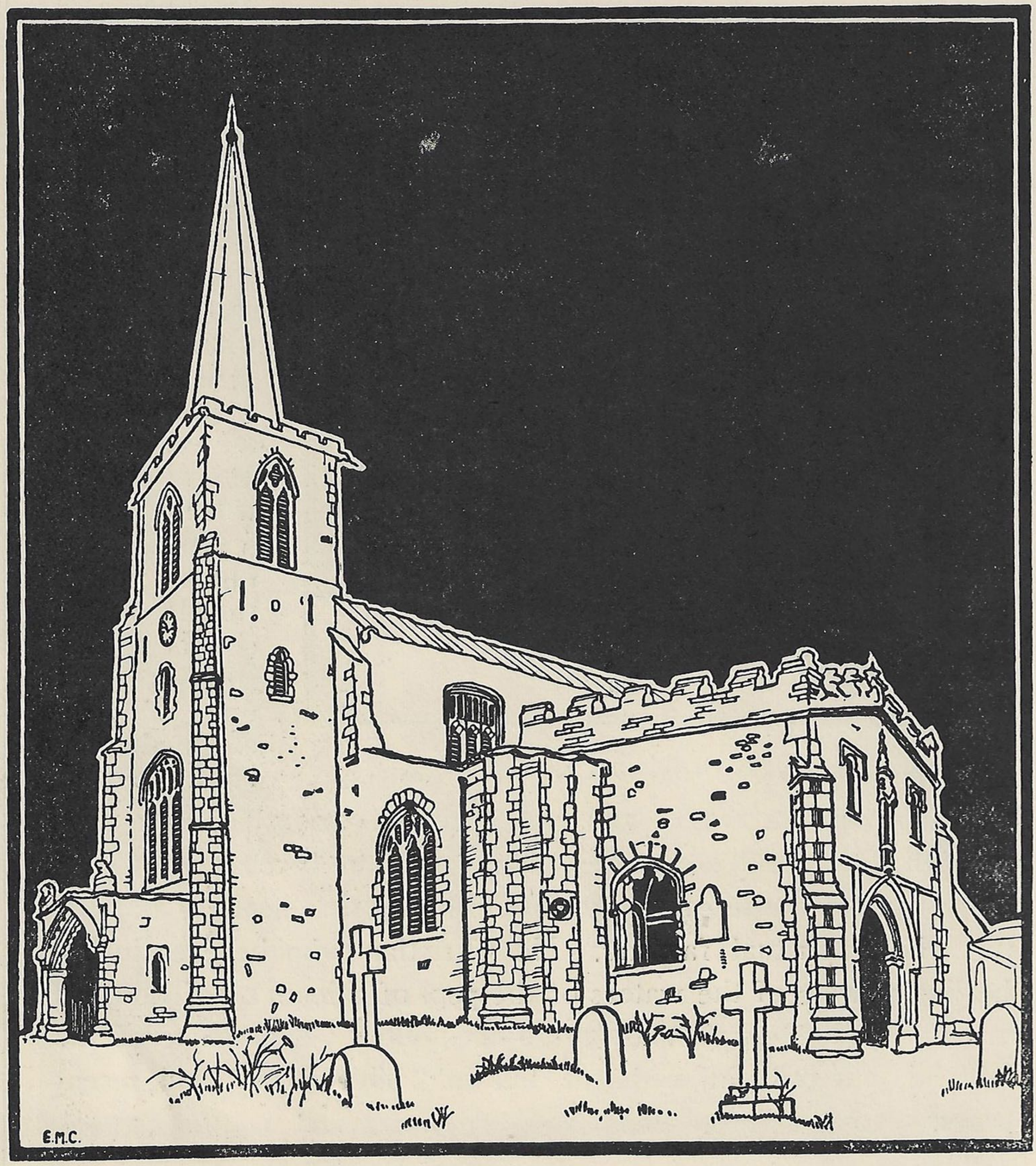
visions of Saints allowed by God for the kindling of faith and the good of souls. In our fathers' time Our Lady manifested herself at Lourdes, at Portmaine and, in our days, at Banneaux in Belgium, and so in the years just preceding the Norman invasion she revealed herself to Richeldis in far off Norfolk. Showing her the house of the Incarnation she requested that a chapel fashioned after that model should be built. But where was the little oratory to be placed? Again Our Lady was to make her will clear, and in accordance with her promise a spring of water appeared near the banks of the river, and here some twelve feet to the north of it the Shrine was set up. There were three reasons which drew the palmer to Walsingham; first because it



One of the smallest Friaries in Norfolk (p. 25).

contained the Holy House and so gave to the Shrine the popular name of England's Nazareth; secondly, because its foundation was owing to the request of Mary herself when she appeared there; and thirdly on account of her spring which was at once confined within a round wall forming a well, and the faithful soon learned that through the devout use of this water, with the invocation of Our Lady's prayers, she often procured for the sick healing, and for the whole spiritual favours. No Christian who believes in the healing powers of the waters of the pool of Siloam or of Lourdes can thoughtlessly brush aside the accumulated experience of the faithful, not only in medieval, but in "bible days" and recent years.

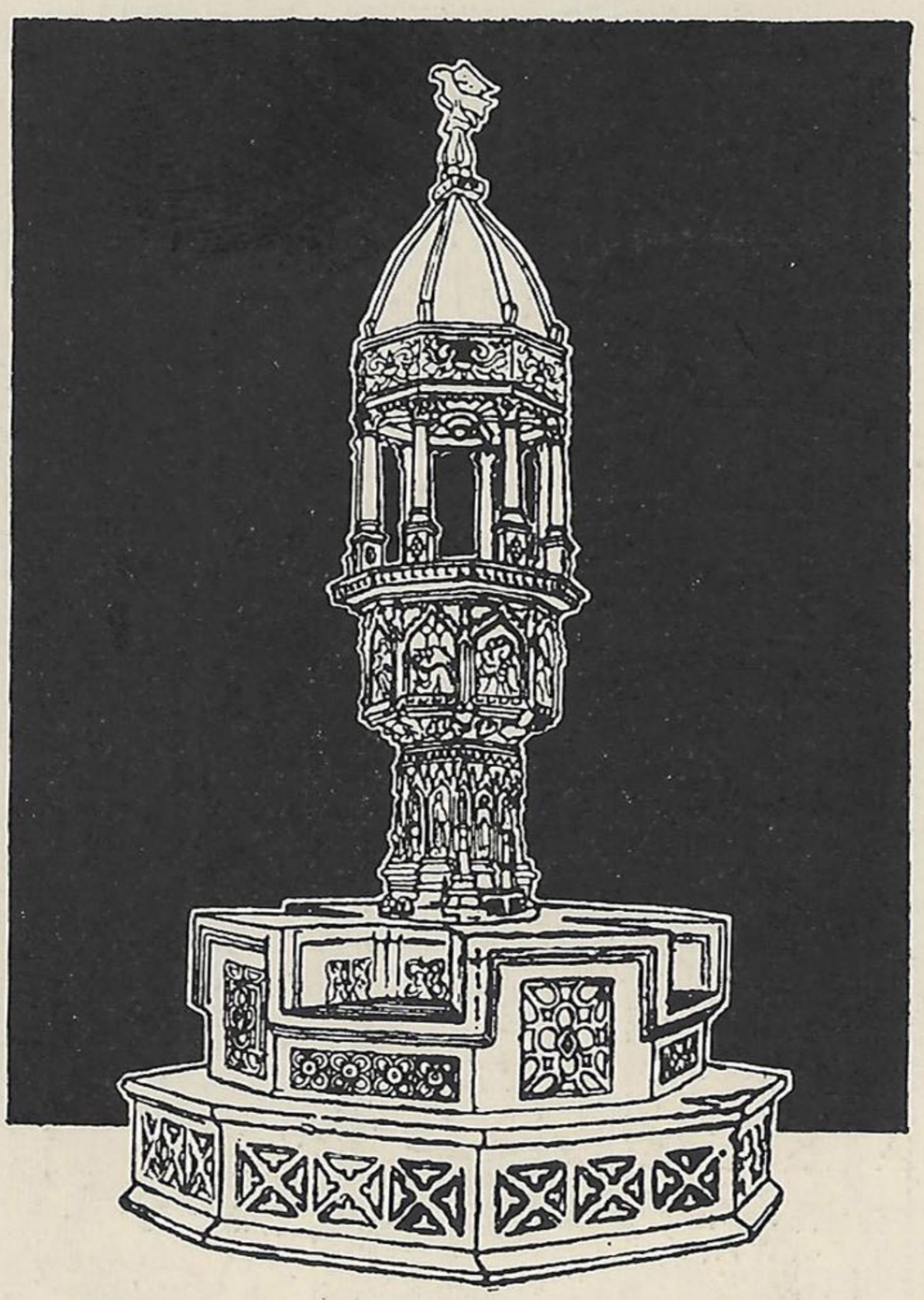
THERE is a fifteenth century legend incorporated in a poem now in the Pepsian Library at Cambridge, which states that Richeldis began to build the chapel but it was completed by Our Lady and the Holy Angels and then translated to another position. This legend sounds like a confusion between the tradition of the Holy House at



S. Mary's Church originally dedicated to All Hallows (p. 25).

Loreto and that of Walsingham, for in 1294 it was reported that the actual house before the cave at Nazareth had been bodily lifted by Angel hands and carried over the Adriatic to Italy, and after a few years it was finally deposited in the roadway on the hill of Loreto. This is declared to be a fact by several Papal Bulls and is necessary for Roman Catholics to accept.

High Altar of the Parish Church of S. Mary (p. 25).

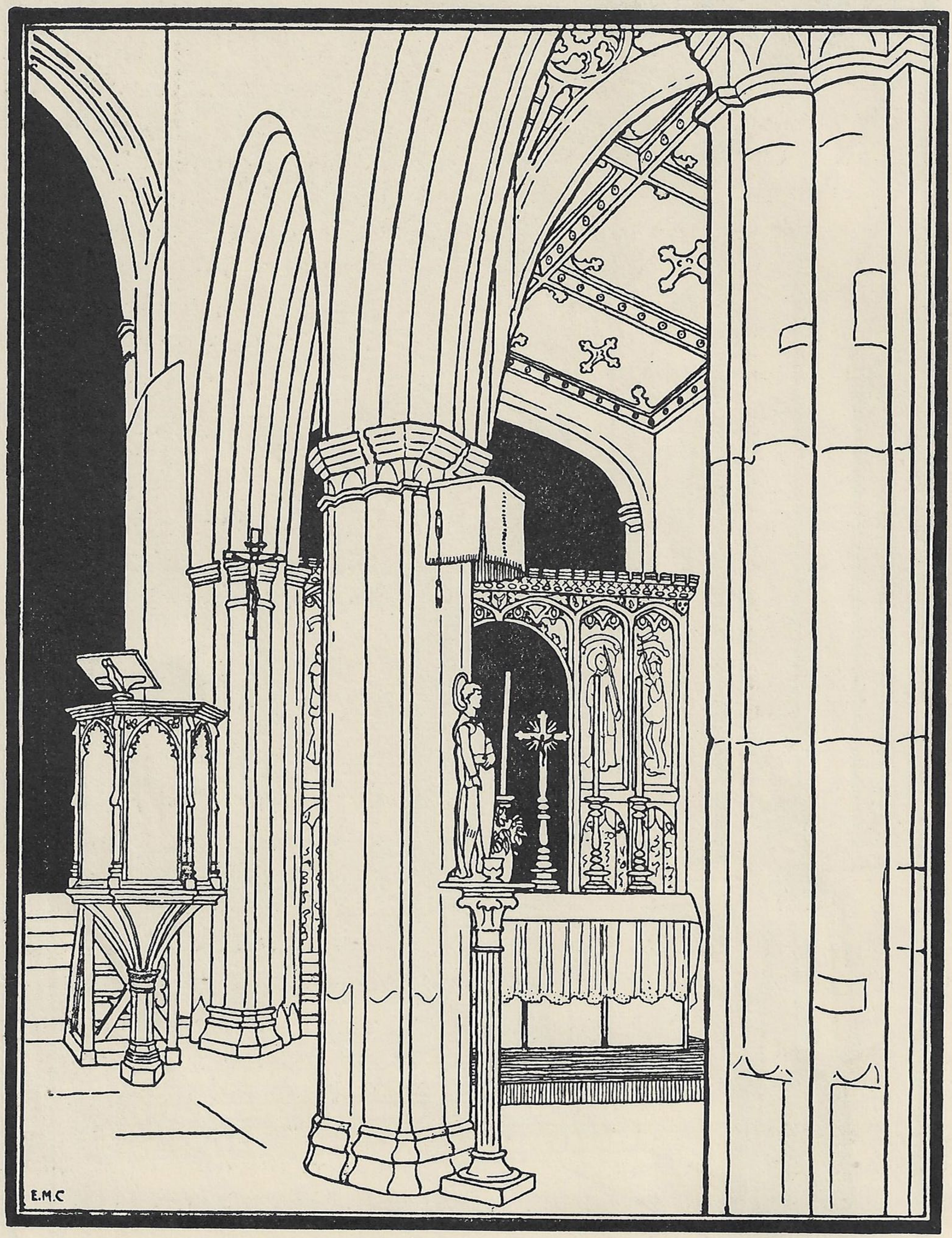


While not denying for one moment the possibility of this aerial flight, for all things are possible with God, and as Philip the Deacon could be so translated*, why not the equally material structure of the Holy House? At the same time we would emphasize the historic fact that the chapel at Walsingham had been a place of pilgrimage for two hundred and thirty-three years *before* the wonders recorded at Loreto had ever been heard of. If this Walsingham legend of the translation is not a fifteenth century incorporation of the Loreto tradition, then is it not possibly a poetic, very poetic way, of recording the removal of the Shrine from its original site at some time subsequent to its foundation? We shall have occasion to refer to this point again.

SOME writers believe that the original chapel was built of wood, and this is certainly more than probable, as many churches and almost all houses were at that time. Great trees would have been cleft in two and set upright in the ground with the rough bark on the outside, the space filled with clay, while the cleft side, often lined with boards, formed the inner wall, a thatched roof being placed over all. But whether it was made of wood, stone, or flint, subsequent records state that the whole chapel was eventually entirely covered by a larger and protecting building. We are led to be-

* Acts 8, 29.

Entrance to the Guilds' Chapel, S. Mary's Church (p. 27).



Chapel of S. George in St. Mary's Church (p. 25).

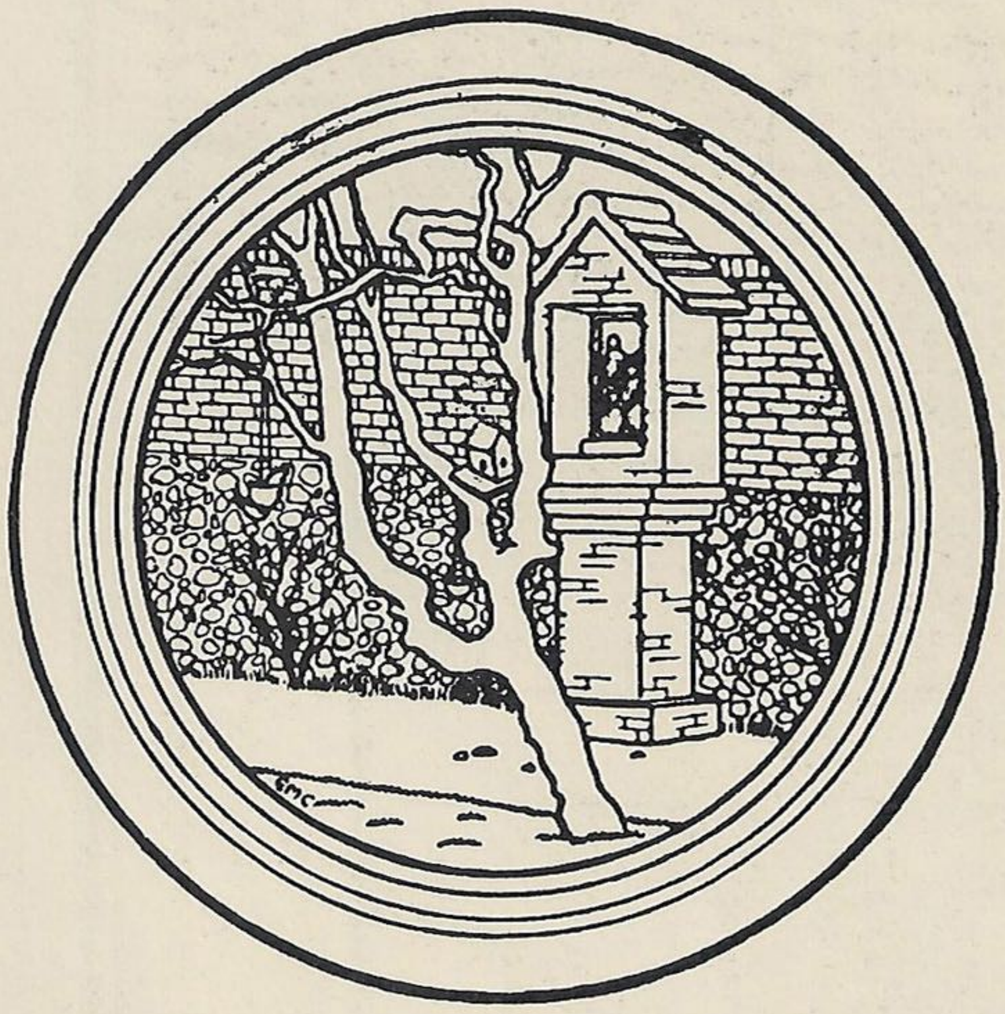
lieve that this work was achieved in the very earliest days of the foundation of the Shrine. There may have been many reasons for thus enclosing the chapel within another and stronger building. One purpose which at once springs to our mind is that it was so enclosed to protect the walls built at the request of Our Lady herself, holy walls which were believed to be an actual copy of the house which at that time existed in Nazareth. A second reason would be to safeguard the treasure which undoubtedly began to accumulate there from the very first days of its foundation, votive offerings of great value and artistic merit which pilgrims poured forth at the feet of Our Lady in this Chapel.

The form of this outer building has been preserved for us, quite by chance, in the twelfth century seal of the Priory at Walsingham. This house was founded about 1145 and possibly owing to the marshy nature of the soil upon which the Shrine had been built, in 1061, the Canons set up their domestic buildings and Church about two hundred feet to the south of Our Lady's Chapel, on slightly higher and certainly firmer ground. The Canons were constituted guardians of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Walsingham.

IT is upon the seal of this house we have preserved for us the only delineation that is known to exist of the outer church of England's Nazareth. It depicts a low rectangular building with four small turrets one at each corner, in the centre of the main body of the building being a porch with on either side a window; the ridge of the roof is broken in the centre by a wooden lantern. Now, it is a remarkable coincidence, but nevertheless a fact, that the ancient foundations uncovered in 1937-8 and now partly enclosed in the crypt of the new Pilgrimage Church, correspond exactly with the building shown upon the seal of the Priory; indeed Mr. Henderson, F.R.I.B.A., an archæologist of no little repute, when he had examined these foundations, and before he was shown the picture of the seal, described the form of the building he visualised as having stood upon these footings. His description was exactly in accord with the seal. In his opinion

Houses influenced by the fashions of the Low Countries (p. 25).

and that of others whose conclusions are worthy of credit, these ancient remains are of either Saxon or early Norman date. It therefore seems to be a proven fact that within a decade or so of the original establishment of the Holy House in the valley of the Stiffkey, it was covered by another chapel which was adorned with

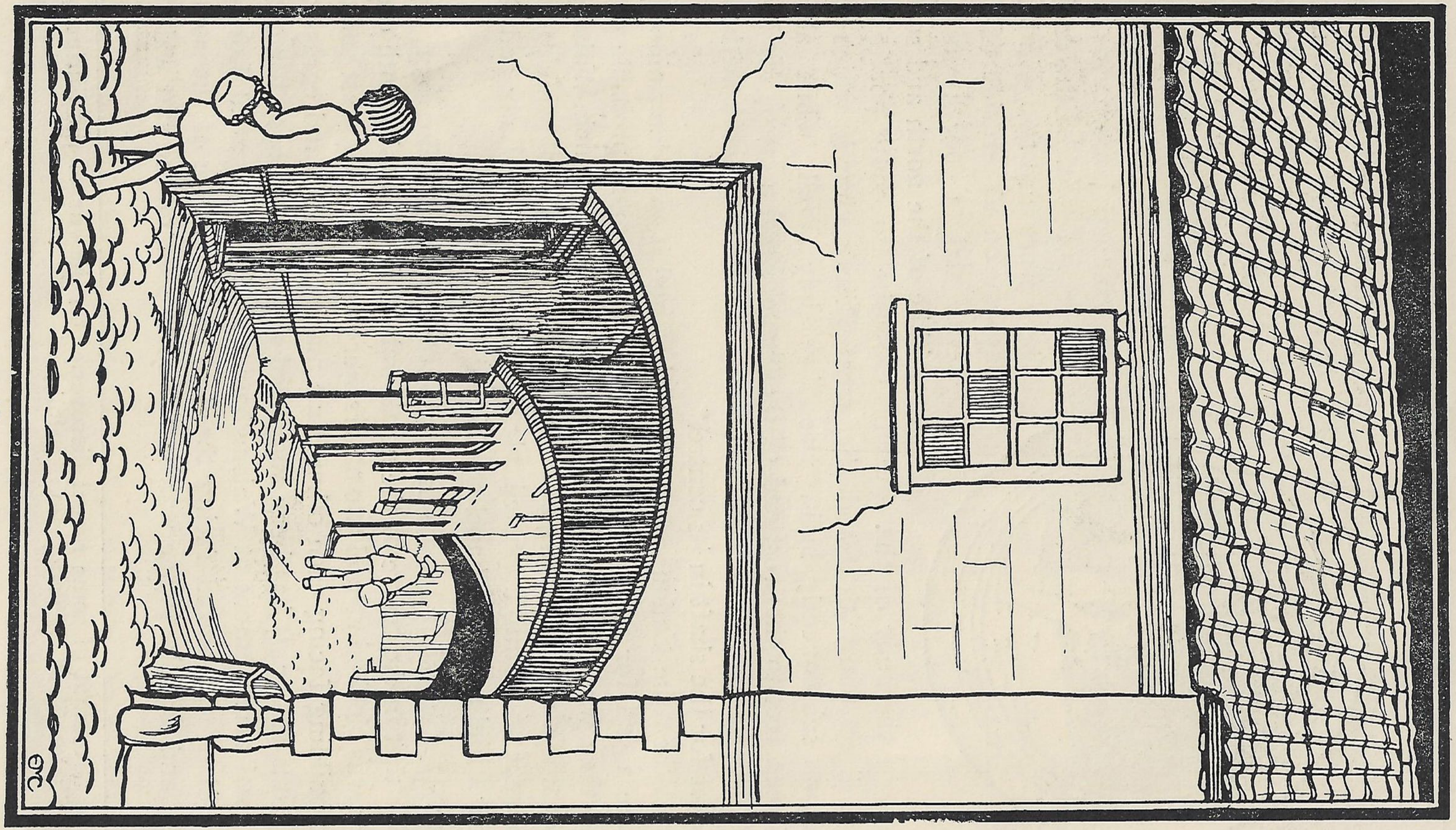


four turrets and a roof light in the form of a lantern, not unlike the famous tower of Allan of Walsingham at Ely, and which in all probability inspired that great monastic architect when designing the far grander lantern for the Shrine of St. Etheldreda. There were also two windows possibly on either side of the nave, and a porch in the middle of the north and south walls of the body of the church. Opposite the south porch and in a direct line with it and the great Priory church which the Canons subsequently built, was the Holy Well, while about thirteen feet to the west end of the chapel stood a cross, for here in 1937 was uncovered its base made of solid flint-work with the socket for the shaft in its centre.*

When the Canons were established and it was determined to make a seal for use in the chapter, what was more probable than that they would depict thereon those objects for which Walsingham was already famous, and for the Guardianship of which their Convent and Church existed, viz., the image of Our Lady and the Holy Child and the Chapel containing the Shrine?

THE Chapel at Loreto originally contained only one door, and that in the centre of the north wall. This in the sixteenth century was blocked up and two others were pierced to the west end of the building facing each other, thus making ingress and egress of pilgrims easier. It has been suggested that this may have been the original arrangement at Walsingham and that here, as at Loreto, the Altar was placed facing the door in the centre of the south wall, and that the image was on the north side, on the east wall of

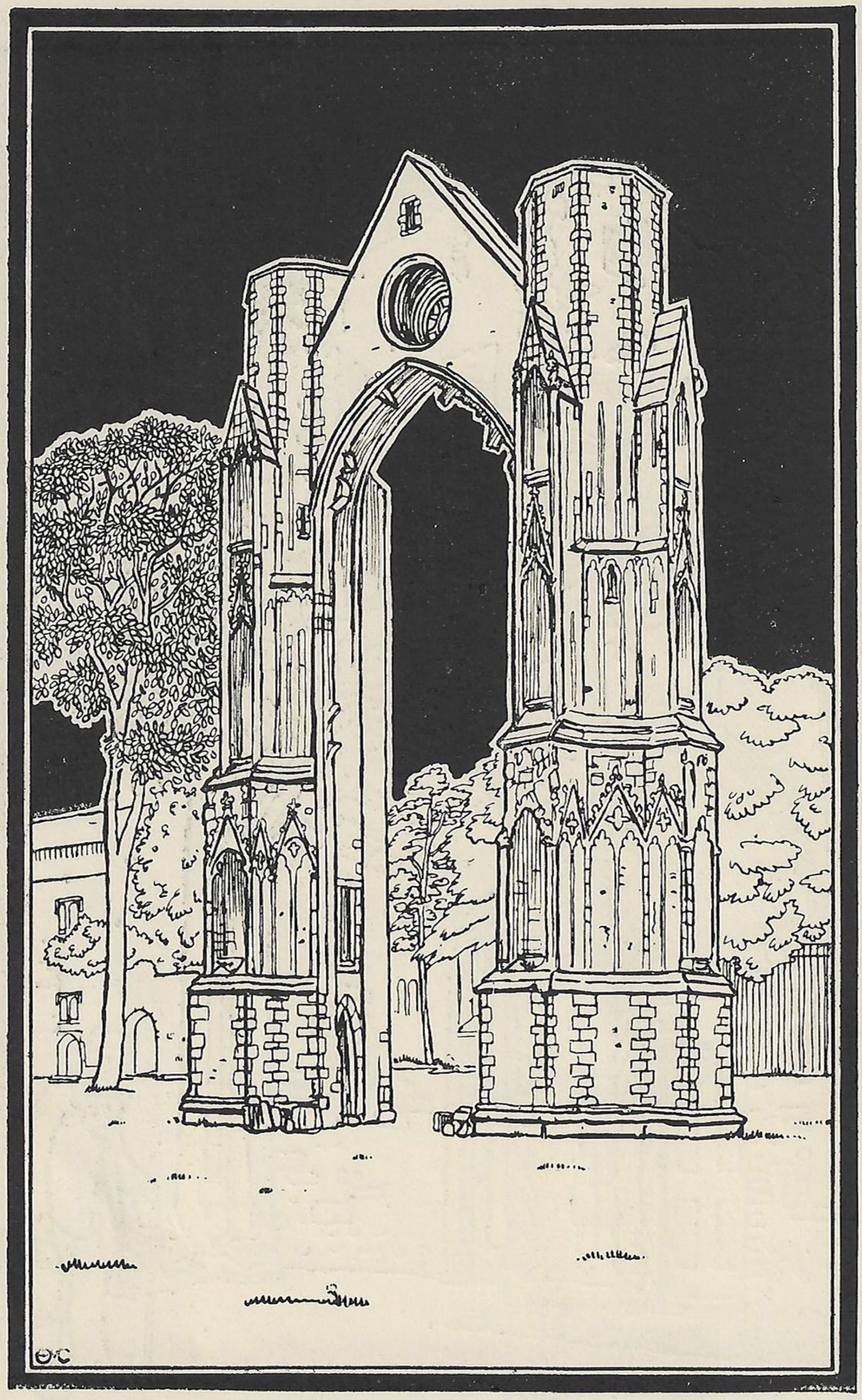
(*See " Account of some recent discoveries on the site of the Shrine." The Shrine Shop, Walsingham, Norfolk).



Entries reminiscent of countries further South (p. 25).

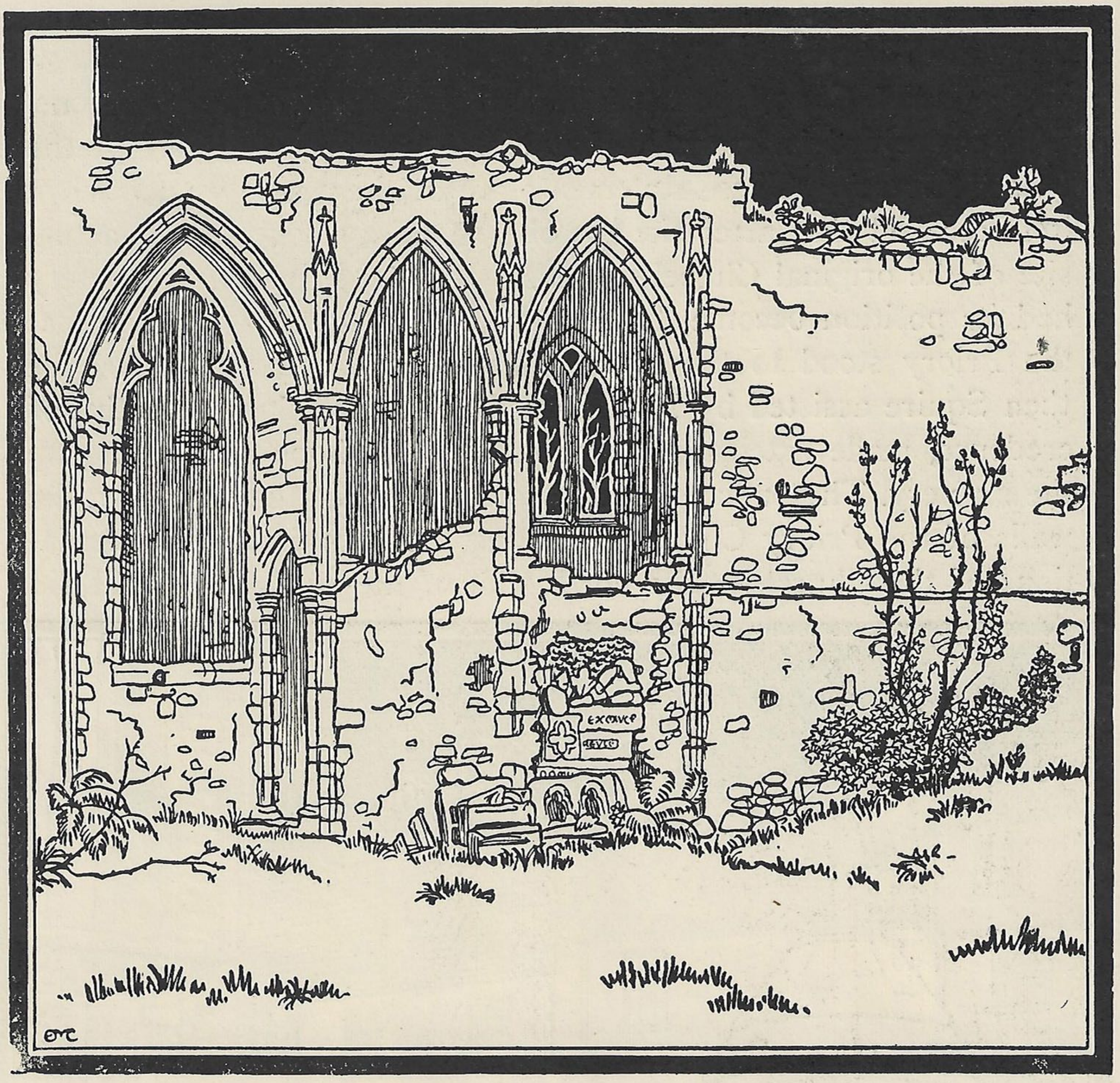
The Stone Gate guards the entrance to the Priory (p. 25).

the Chapel. Of this, however, we have no record, and until the visit of Erasmus (C. 1511) who mentions the two doors in the



Ruins of the East end of the Priory Church (p. 26).

Holy House, no description of the appearance of the Shrine has come down to us. William of Worcester in the previous century gave us an indication of the size both of the Holy House and the outer Chapel, and Erasmus in the early Sixteenth century tells us that the image of Our Lady was small and insignificant. He informs us also that the Holy House was full of jewels and gold and that the Canon in charge drew from beneath the altar itself many objects of surprising value, the number of which was past record. He also says that the Holy House had no light except from the numerous candles which the pilgrims set up there. In these later medieval days it was the

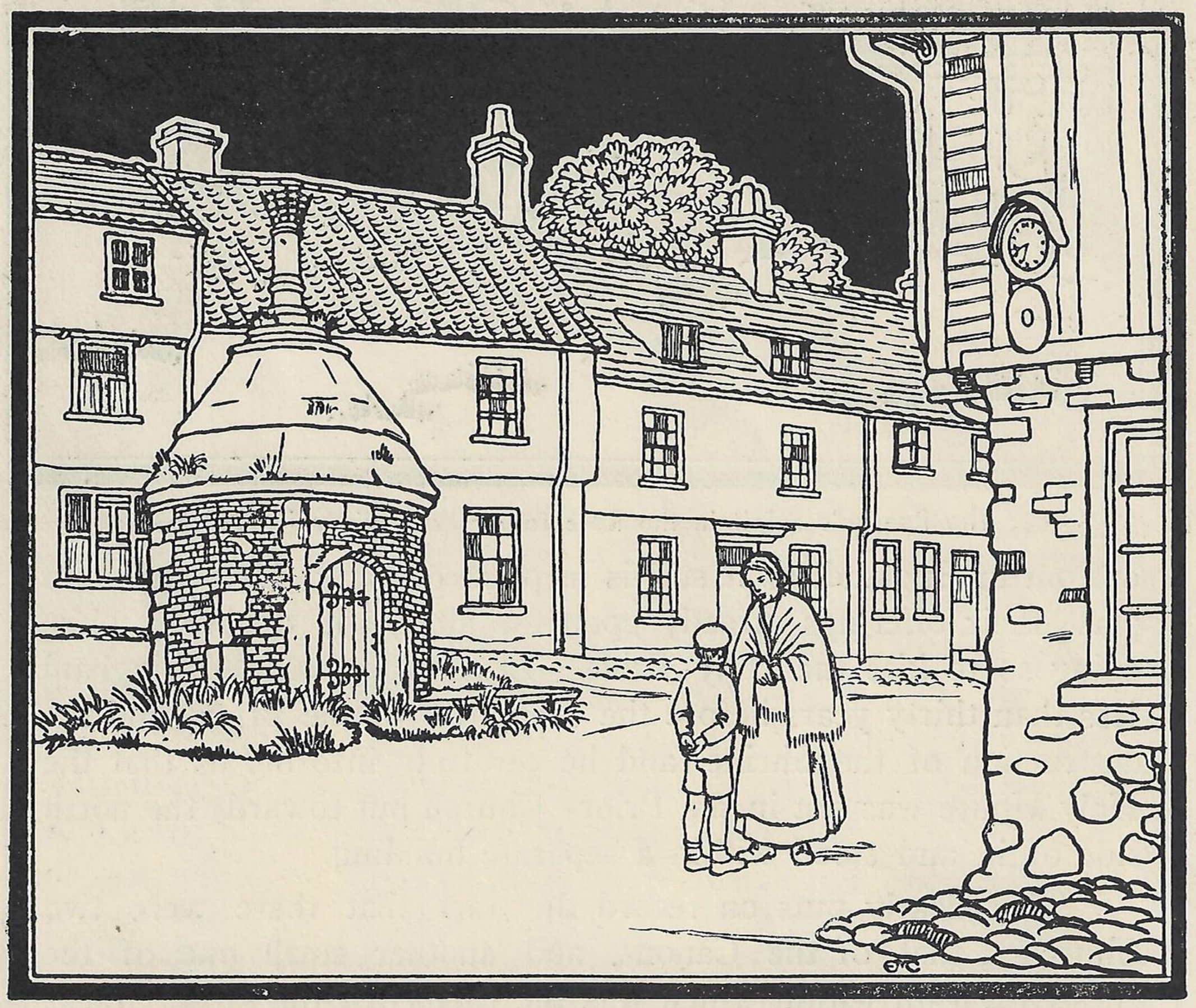


The Reader's Pulpit in the Refectory of the Priory (p. 26).

custom in England, as it still is in parts of Italy, for pilgrims to place their offerings directly upon the altar, and doubtless while doing so to kiss the Holy Table. Erasmus visited Walsingham less than thirty years before the overthrow of the Priory and the destruction of the Shrine, and he carefully informs us that the Holy House was not in the Priory Church but towards the north side of it, and stood within a separate building.

This clearly puts on record the fact that there were two Churches, that of the Canons, and another small one of the Blessed Virgin within which was the Chapel of the Holy House. We are told that when Edward II came as a pilgrim to Walsing-

ham, the King made his offering at the High Altar to the image in the small Chapel situated in the cemetery of the Canons. This graveyard is known to have been on the north side of the Priory Church. These statements are of great significance when it is recalled that after the dissolution all memory of the actual site of the original Chapel was lost. Indeed so veiled in mystery had its position become, beyond the fact that it was known that the Priory stood to the south, that in 1853 the nephew of the then Squire assisted by Mr. Harrod, an Archæologist worthy of credence, made extensive excavations in the hope of clearing up the mystery. They uncovered the foundations of the refectory, the walls of the Priory Church, they dug trenches from the foundations of the Church to the north wall of the garden and still did



Common Place which gave entrance to the West Gate of the Priory (p. 25).

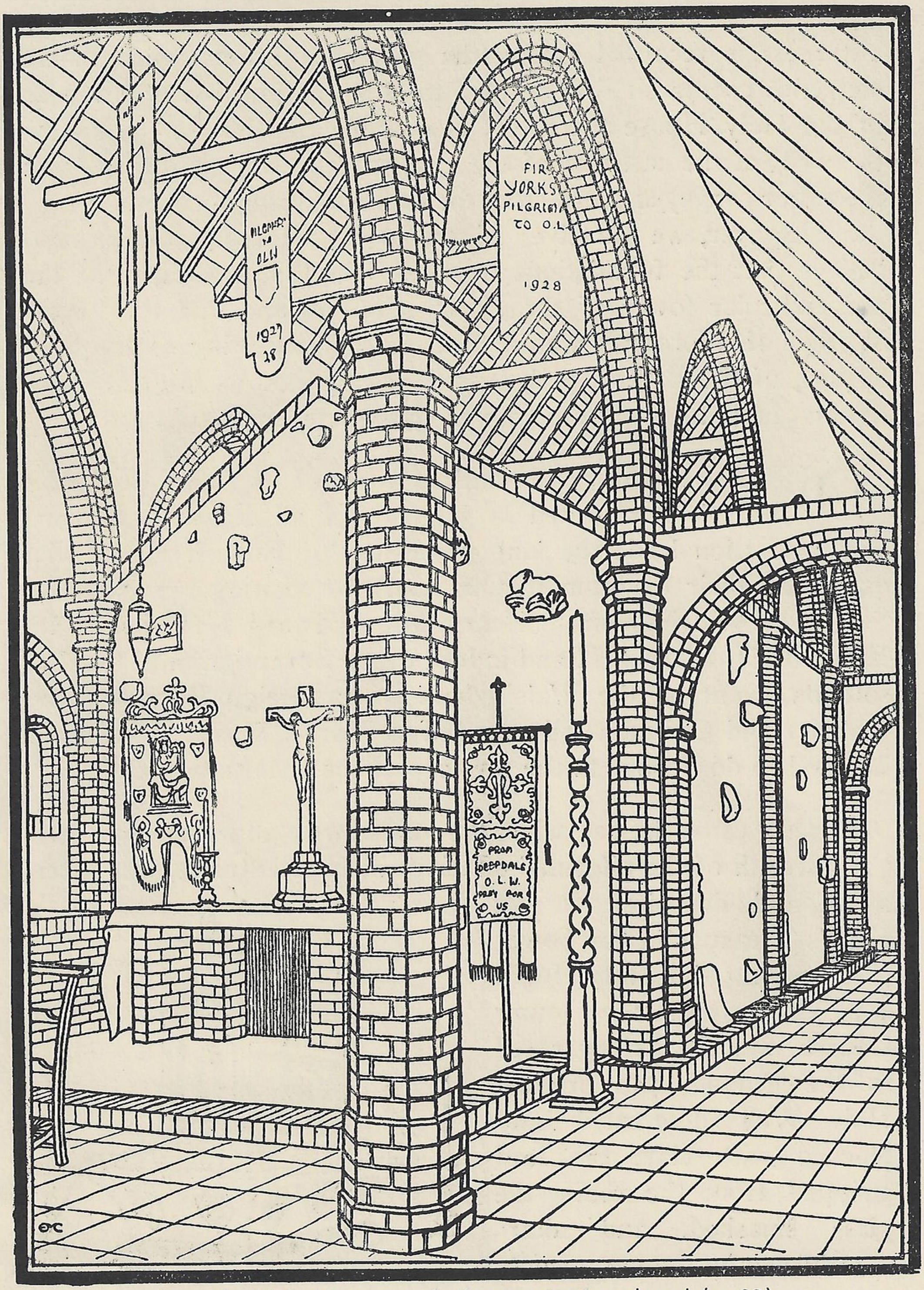
West Entrance to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham (p. 29).

not find the site of the Shrine. But they were eventually rewarded by discovering, adjoining the walls of the Priory, large foundations, which were said so clearly to correspond with the dimensions given by William of Worcester of the outer church that Mr. Lee Warner was convinced they were the remains they were seeking for. On the other hand, however, Mr. Harrod, who was the expert, emphatically denied that these remains could be those of the ancient Shrine. He suggested that they were footings of a tower built, we would suggest, after the manner of that at Foun-

tains Abbey in Yorkshire. Others say it could not be the base of a tower as it does not come in the required position according to Worcester's placings, but it is interesting to note that no footings of a character necessary to support so great a tower exist within the foundations of the Priory, with the exception of the foundations at the extreme west end of the church. May this not be, and certainly it would be reasonable to expect, an important north porch, especially imposing on account of its being one of the ways from the church to the Shrine? We are told that there were indications of two small doors leading out into the cemetery. This seems to dispose of the theory of its being a porch, unless owing to the confined place of the shrine itself it was so arranged in order that when great crowds assembled they could be more easily regulated as they left the Priory Church to visit the very small Shrine.

ASSUMING that Mr. Lee Warner's opinion is the right one, we remember that William of Worcester calls the outer church containing the Holy House the "New Work," and we know that in 1511 Henry VIII was having new glass painted for its windows.

It is reasonable to expect that a small building forty-eight feet by thirty feet used by countless pilgrims for close on five hundred years must have been repaved on many occasions. Also with the change of fashions it is possible that the outer Church was remodelled and that in the fifteenth or sixteenth century a building similar, let us say, to the Lady Chapel (i.e. Henry VII's) at Westminster Abbey, might have taken the place of that depicted on the twelfth century seal. It is also possible that in the fifteenth century, owing to circumstances now forgotten, the Holy House was moved to a new Church which might have been called the "New Work," and so the foundations uncovered by Mr. Lee Warner might be those of this latter church. A poetic account of this change of position may have been used in order to allay the prejudice, and perhaps superstition, of the pilgrims of those days. For it will be remembered that great superstition and



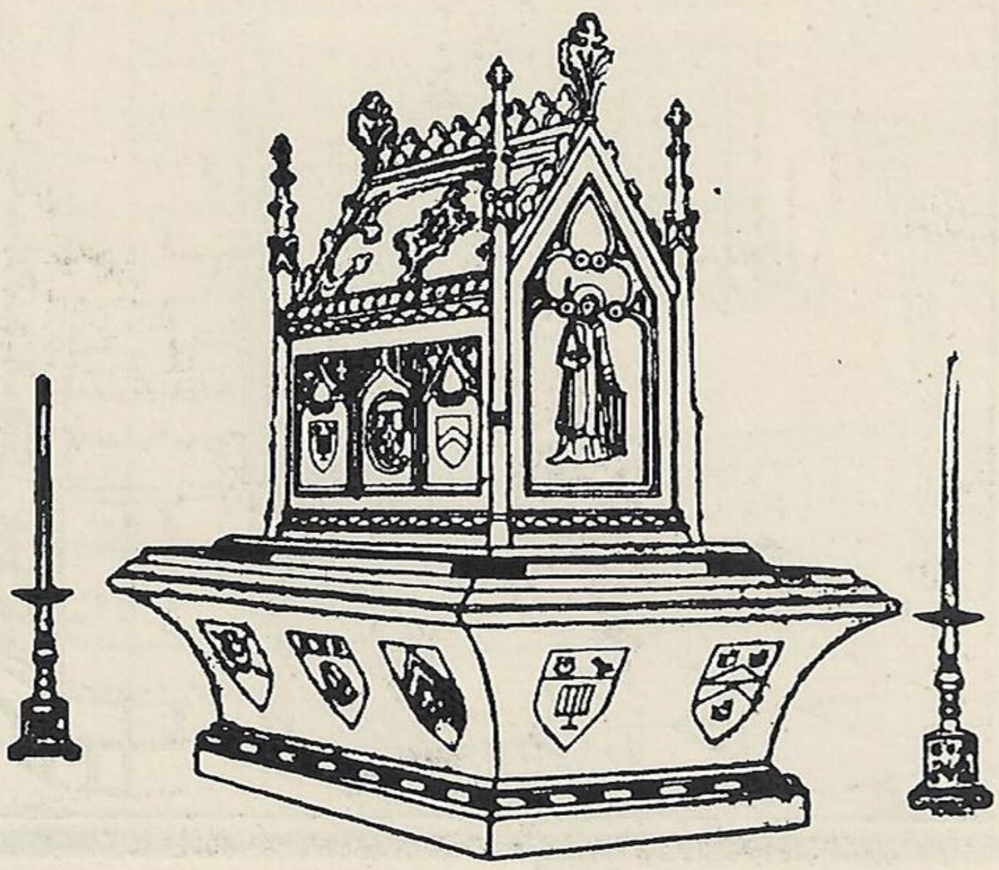
Over the Holy House was built a protecting chapel (p. 29).

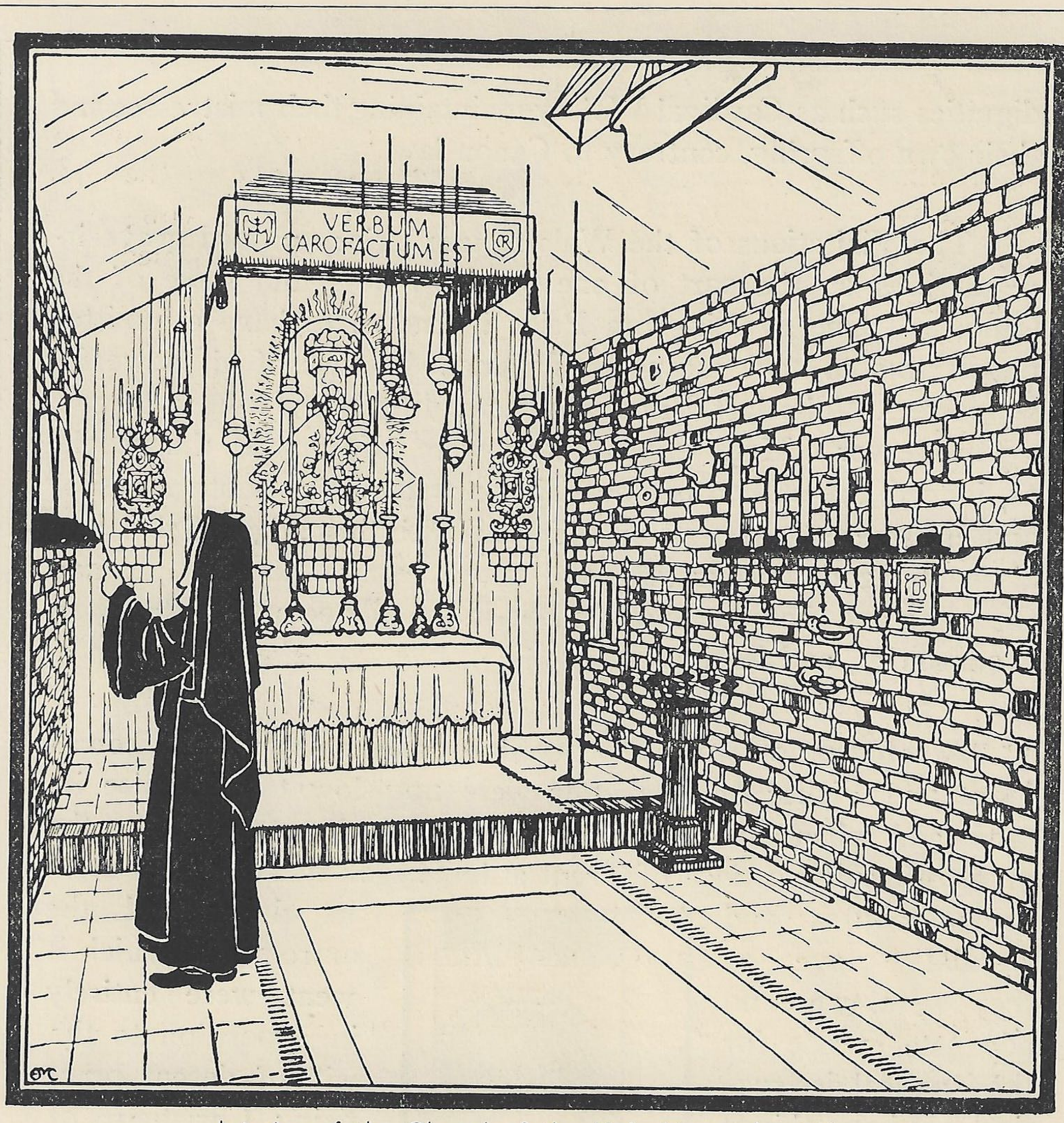
bitterness is recorded among the people of Loreto when in the sixteenth century it was decided to alter the position of the door in the Holy House there. It is possible that at the same time the wells at the east end of the Priory Church were formed, and the water conveyed there from the original spring by a conduit.

However, we ourselves adhere to Mr. Harrod's theory, and believe that the foundations uncovered in 1853 are those of the perpendicular tower of the Priory Church, and that the "New Work" of Worcester was a recasing and reglazing of the little Church of the B.V.M. perhaps still standing on its original foundations built to cover the Chapel constructed in 1061.

DURING the first five hundred years of its fame, England's Nazareth was visited by pilgrims of all degrees. Richard Cœur de Lion leads the long procession of English Kings who expressed their devotion to Our Lady by visiting her National Shrine at Walsingham. Henry III, Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, Richard II and indeed every Sovereign until the dissolution, went on the Walsingham way; foreign Royalties, the Nobility and Commons all crowded to Mary's Shrine to venerate her and to do honour to the mystery of the Incarnation.

THEN came the day when the image, with all the accumulated wealth of the pilgrims' offerings of five centuries, was taken away and deposited in the King's Treasury in the Tower of London. The Holy House was destroyed, the outer Church and the Priory razed to the ground, the original Holy Well desecrated and blocked with clay, the lead stripped from the roofs, the glass smashed, and altars overthrown by the very people





Interior of the Chapel of the Holy House (p. 28).

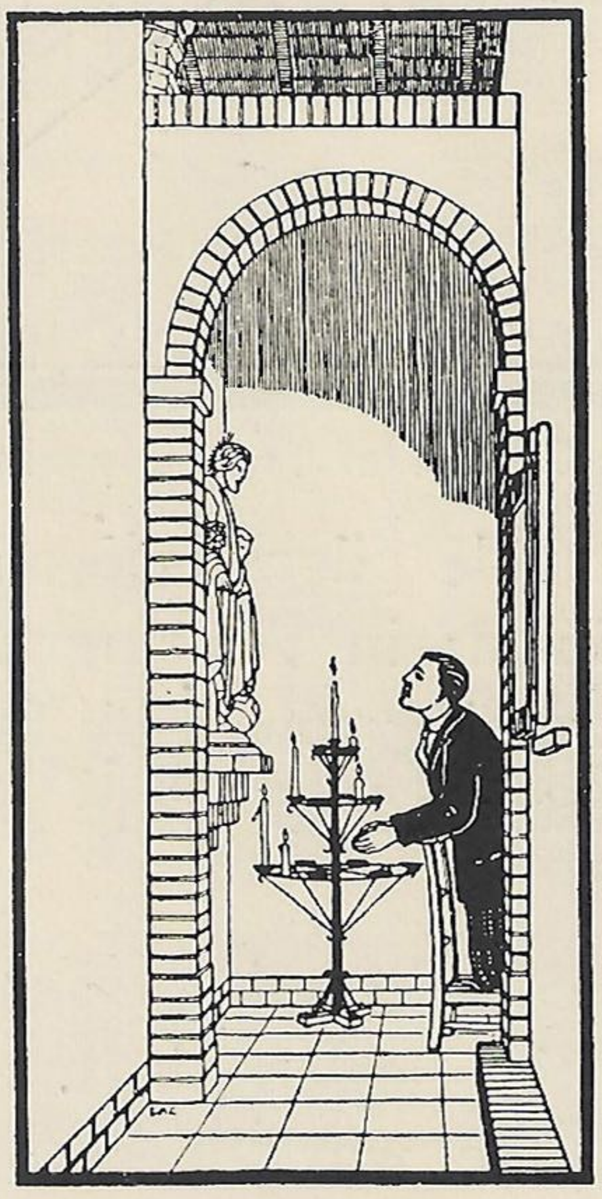
who in childhood had made pilgrimage and invoked the aid of God's Mother at her Shrine in Walsingham. Catholics from birth, upbringing, and training cowed by fear or fired by the lust of gain, robbed and destroyed all that was left of England's Nazareth.

MANY things had contributed to make these sacrilegious events possible: the neglect, in many places, of the due observance of religion, the worldliness of a great number of Clergy and Religious, priests and even great ecclesiastical

dignities such as Cardinal Wolsey maintaining their mistresses and their own offspring, contrary to Canon law.

The Visitations of the Walsingham Priory proved grave irregularities on the part of one of the Priors and some of the Canons. One Walsingham Prior is known to have committed murder but to have escaped punishment because of his powerful supporters. The last Prior was, according to existing accounts, a time-server. Many superstitions were rife among the people, as, indeed, are still to be found in parts of Italy, South America and elsewhere to-day, all of which aided in bringing religion into disrepute and encouraged and gave excuse to the nominal Christian and the unbeliever, to lead in the pillage of the Churches, Monasteries, and Shrines.

A reformation was sadly overdue, and men like S.S. Thomas More and Fisher of Rochester were not slow to recognise its need, and when universal collapse seemed almost inevitable the great reforming council of Trent at last began its sitting. But of course abuses and scandal, grave as they were, were no adequate excuse for the fanatical destruction of holy things dedicated to God and his Saints. The mode of the reformation in England did almost irreparable evil in this land. For despite the need of reformation, the way of its doing and the extremes to which it went were entirely in opposition to the will of decent practising Christians of the time, and the schism of the sixteenth century was an evil of such magnitude that four hundred years have not healed, and perhaps a thousand will not repair.



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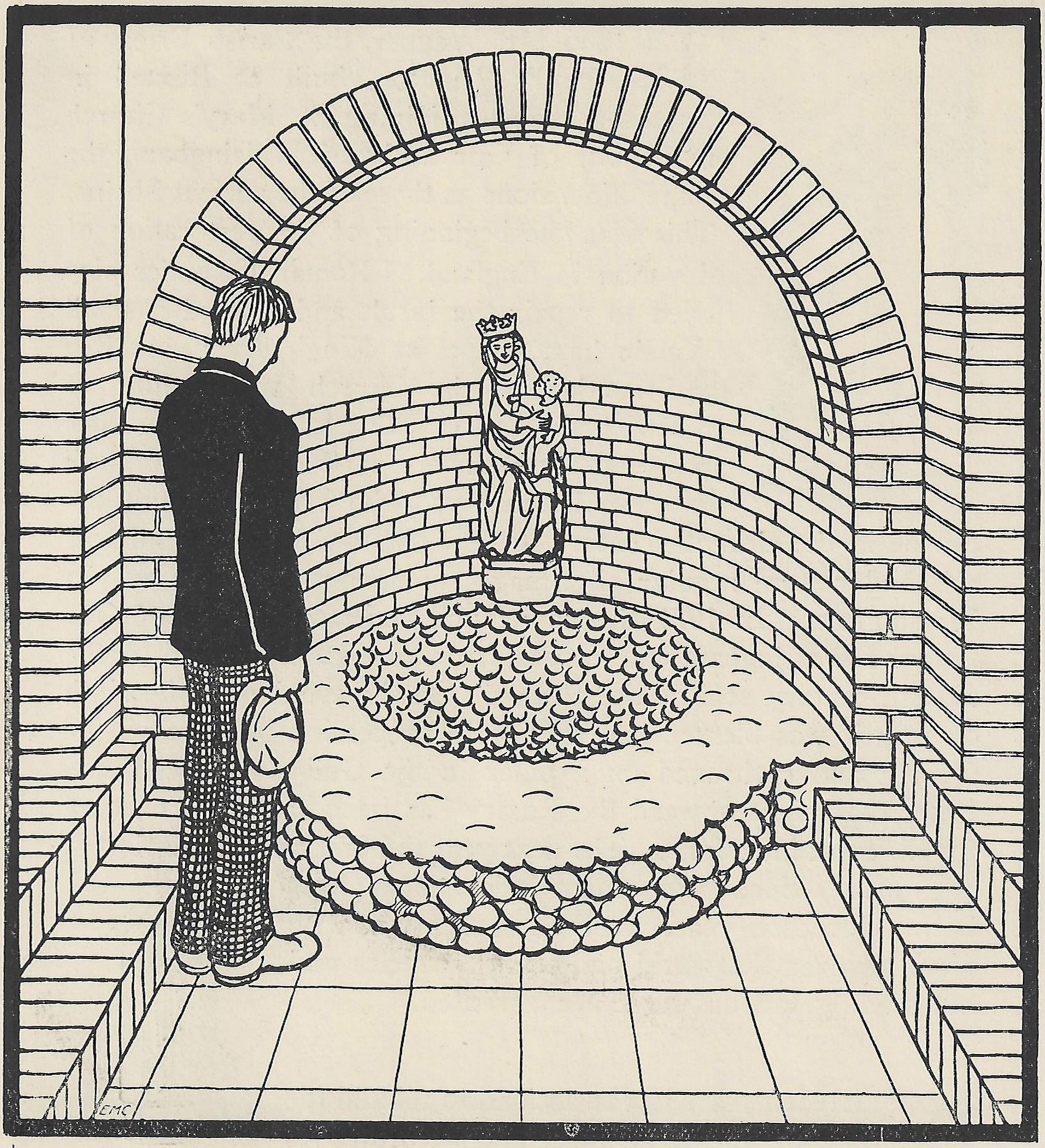
BUT Walsingham was not destroyed. The place chosen by Our Lady in those far off Saxon days was only waiting; the memory of Mary's Shrine was not totally forgotten. After sleeping silently, browsing over the past four centuries, the village and its old houses have now woken up and, though outwardly changed, their medieval walls again house the votary of Our Lady. Here there are houses influenced by the fashions of the Low Countries, there are "entries" reminiscent of countries further south, while the Common Place, the little square which formerly gave entrance to the West Gate of the Priory, still contains its ancient Pump House. Nearly all the buildings of this village were at one time used as pilgrims' hostels, and the greater number of those now standing were constructed before the sixteenth century.

At the entrance to Walsingham are the remains of the Franciscan Friary. The Friars came to Walsingham in the fourteenth century despite the great opposition of the Canons of St. Augustine, who feared the loss of revenue and influence. The remains of this house lead us to suppose that it was one of the most beautiful of the Friaries in the county. These ruins, together with those of the Priory, are open to the public on Wednesdays and Bank holidays.

ST. Mary's Church, originally dedicated to All Hallows, was among the first gifts made for the maintenance of the Shrine. With the coming of the Canons it became a Vicarage, and was served by that community. To-day despoiled of its former glory, still it is one of the most beautiful among the Norfolk parish Churches, famous for its Seven Sacrament Font. It is again a building much loved by parishioners and pilgrims as of old.

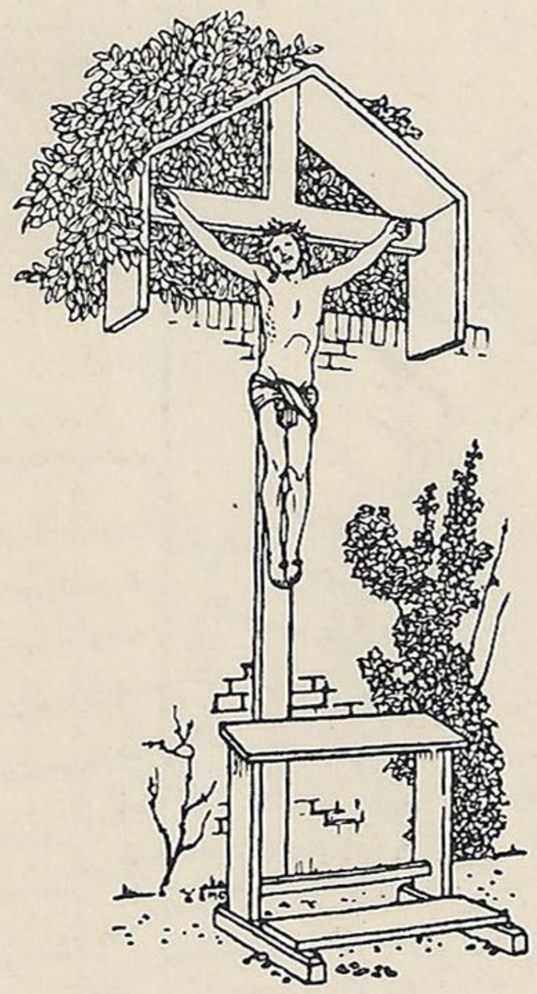
On the old highway the Stone Gate still guards the entrance to the precincts of the Priory. Here little remains to indicate its ancient glory. Foundations of the western porch and, in the

Opposite page: Pilgrimage Church from north Choir's aisle.

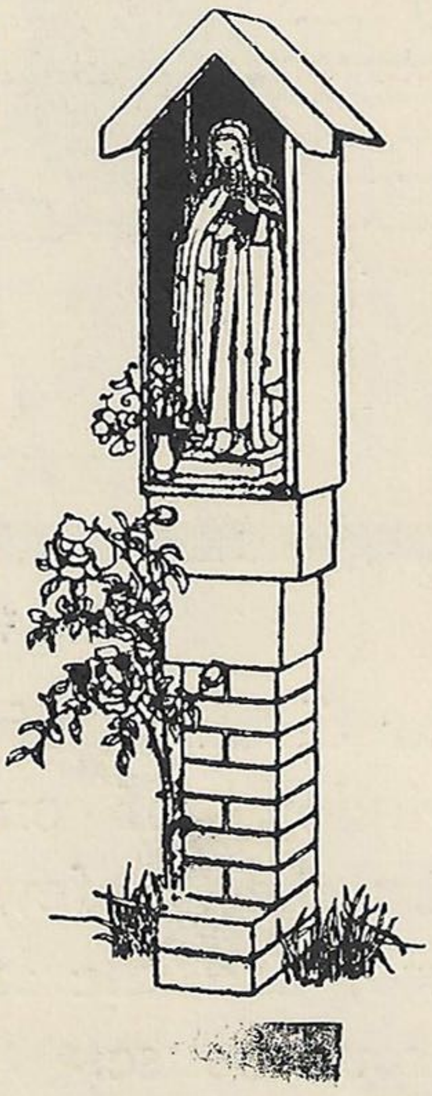


The Holy Well now enclosed in the Shrine (p. 29).

far distance, of the great arch which originally enclosed the east window of one of England's most famous and magnificent churches, a few ruins of the Canons' refectory, an archway or two, and the later medieval wells are all that remains of this proud house.

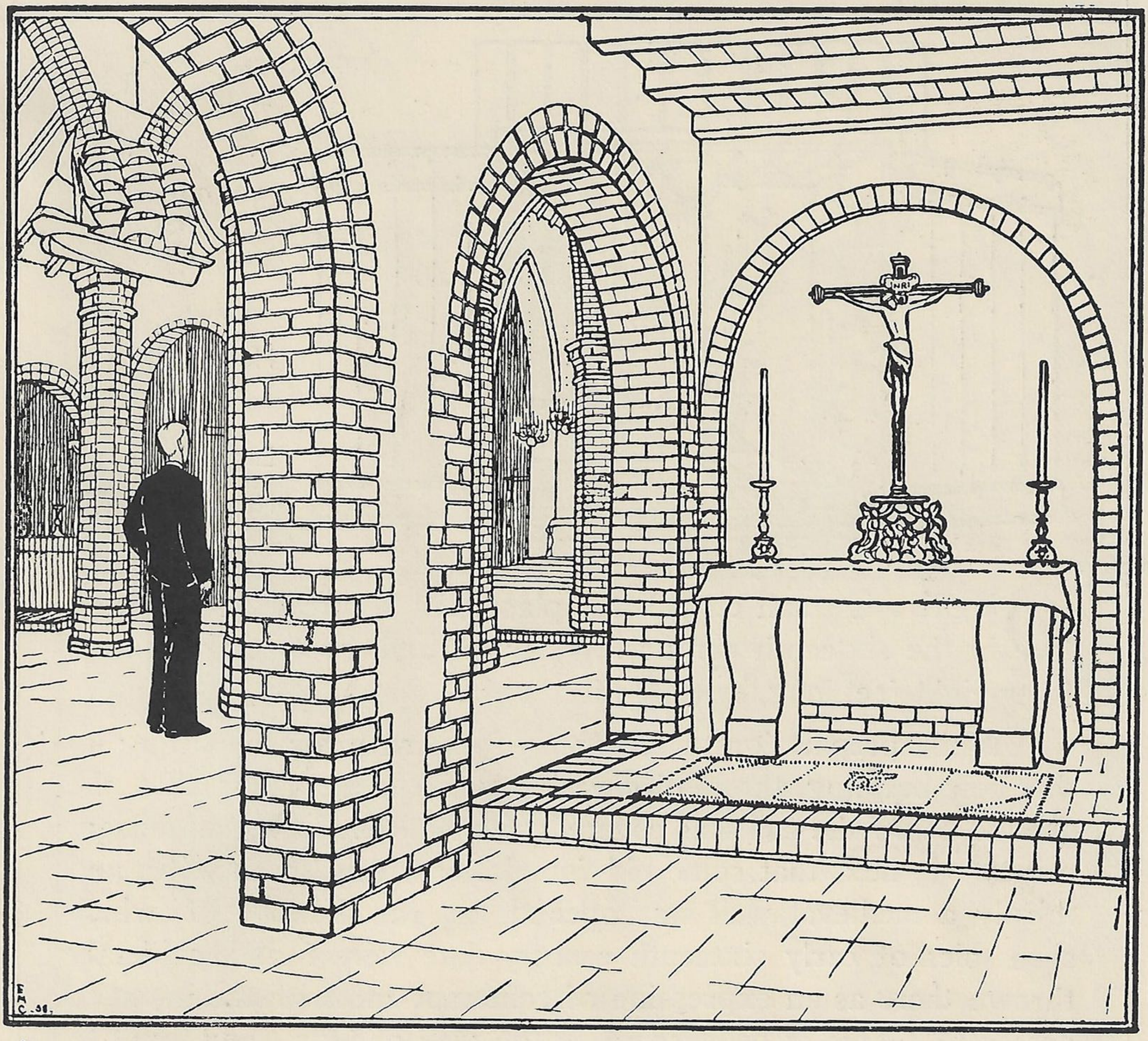


IN 1886 Mr. Wagner, the Parish Priest of St. Paul's Brighton, built at Buxted in Sussex a chapel adjoining St. Mary's Church in honour of Our Lady of Walsingham, the same dimensions as those of the ancient Shrine. This was the beginning of the restoration of devotion in England. Roman Catholics also tried to repair the insult and erected a small Walsingham chapel at King's Lynn in 1896 and another in the Church of St. John at Norwich in 1910. But the privilege was reserved for members of the English Church in these latter days, who originally built the Shrine in the eleventh century, to lead the revival of the ancient cult and restore regular pilgrimages in honour of Our Lady in Walsingham. In 1921 the now much venerated Image of Our Lady of Walsingham was carved from the figure depicted on the twelfth century seal of the Priory. On the evening of the sixth of July it was blessed and carried in procession into the village Church and enthroned on a pillar in the Guilds' Chapel there. From that night onward the Rosary has been said each evening for different intentions. The next year the first annual pilgrimage was made, since when many pilgrimages have been made each year. Intercessions are sent in from all over the world and many miracles and outstanding favours have been granted.*



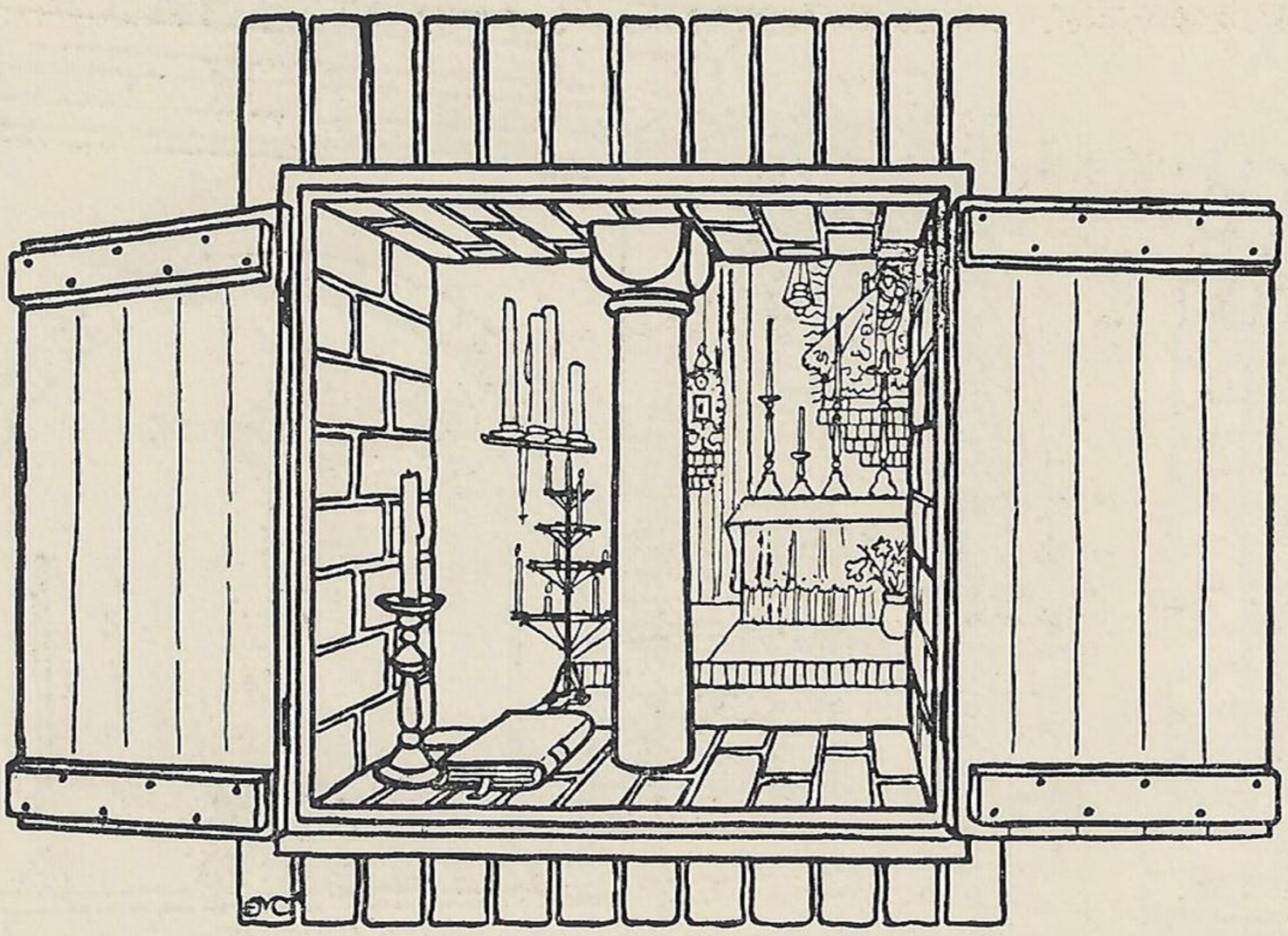
AFTER ten years it was decided to rebuild the Shrine on the same lines and according to dimensions recorded by William of Worcester in the fifteenth century. The reconstructed Holy House was also provided with two small doors, facing each other, according to Erasmus's description of the Shrine in his days. Following the ar-

(*See Our Lady in England, Pub. The Shrine Shop; and England's Nazareth—Donald Hole).



Chapel of S. Ann, in the Pilgrimage Church of the Shrine.

rangements of Loreto, a small window was inserted in the west wall, for is not the Shrine England's Nazareth, and was it not built like the Holy House there? If Loreto is that *very* House, then no doubt Walsingham also had its window; and if Loreto is *not*, as some choose to assert, the actual house from Nazareth, then it is more than probable that the Shrine at Loreto is a copy of the great Shrine of Walsingham, which by the thirteenth century was a world-famous place of pilgrimage.



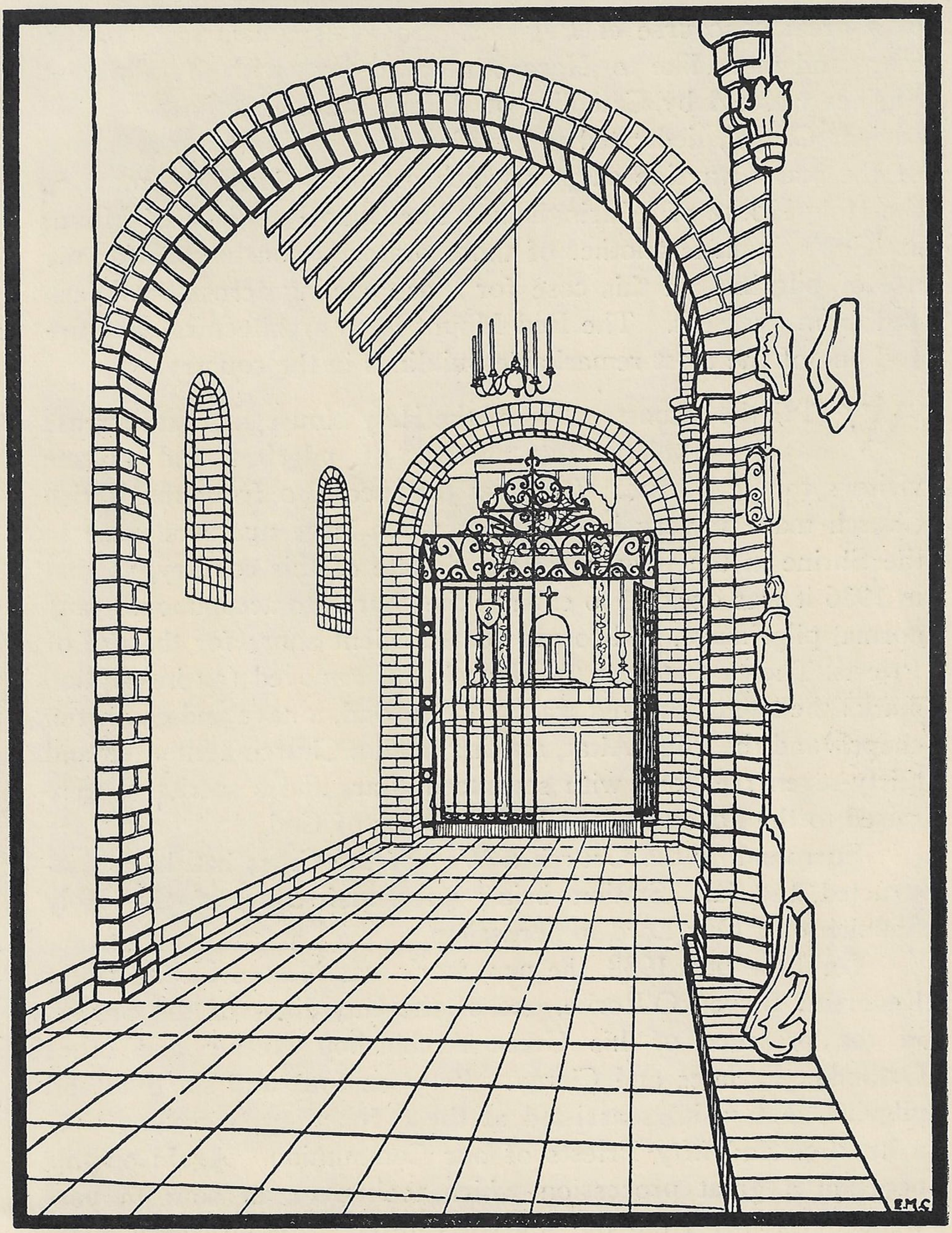
The window at the West end of the Holy House, England's Nazareth.

OVER this small chapel was placed, as before its destruction in the sixteenth century, a larger and protecting church, forty-eight feet long, by thirty feet wide.

While preparations were going forward prior to putting up this new building, three discoveries were made; first that the ground below the soil was covered with the remains of an ancient courtyard; next that some old foundations were on the site; and thirdly a medieval well was opened, at the bottom of which shoe soles of early sixteenth century date were found, evidently thrown there as an expression of contempt and with the intent to desecrate. This is believed to be the well of Our Lady, built to contain the water of the spring which appeared in 1061. The Holy Well is now enclosed in the outer church of the Shrine.

On October 15th, 1931, High Mass was sung pontifically in the Parish Church, and after Benediction a great procession was formed to assist at the translation of the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham to its new home, the reconstructed Holy House.

Nearly three years later, in 1934, the Roman Catholics repaired and opened the ancient Slipper Chapel at Houghton-in-the-Dale as their Shrine. This function was presided over by the late Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, in the presence



South Aisle looking west towards the Chapel of the Nativity.

of a great concourse of Pilgrims. So Walsingham is becoming more and more like to Nazareth of to-day, with its different Shrines claimed by Catholics of different Communions. This ancient Chapel, dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, is one of the many wayside chapels which originally lined the route to the Holy House of Walsingham. The Chapel of the Red Mount at King's Lynn is another of those oratories constructed for the use of pilgrims, in this case for those coming across the Wash and from overseas. The Red Mount is an architectural treasure and one of the most remarkable buildings in the country.

WITH the reconstruction of the Holy House, a great increase was noticeable in the number of pilgrims and private visitors to the Shrine. Its great distance also from the Parish Church made it very inconvenient when large numbers came to the Shrine in the very uncertain climate of this country, so that in 1936 it was decided to enlarge the church to accommodate any normal pilgrimage, and to provide sufficient altars for the use of Priests. The east wall of the Church was removed (an inscription marks the site of this old wall) and, beyond, a nave and choir, ten chapels and the High Altar, making in all a Church a hundred and thirty-seven feet long with seventeen altars and a sacristry, were raised to the honour of the Holy Mother of God.

Surrounding the Church a Way of the Cross had been constructed, the last Station being an actual copy of the Holy Sepulchre of Our Lord in Jerusalem.

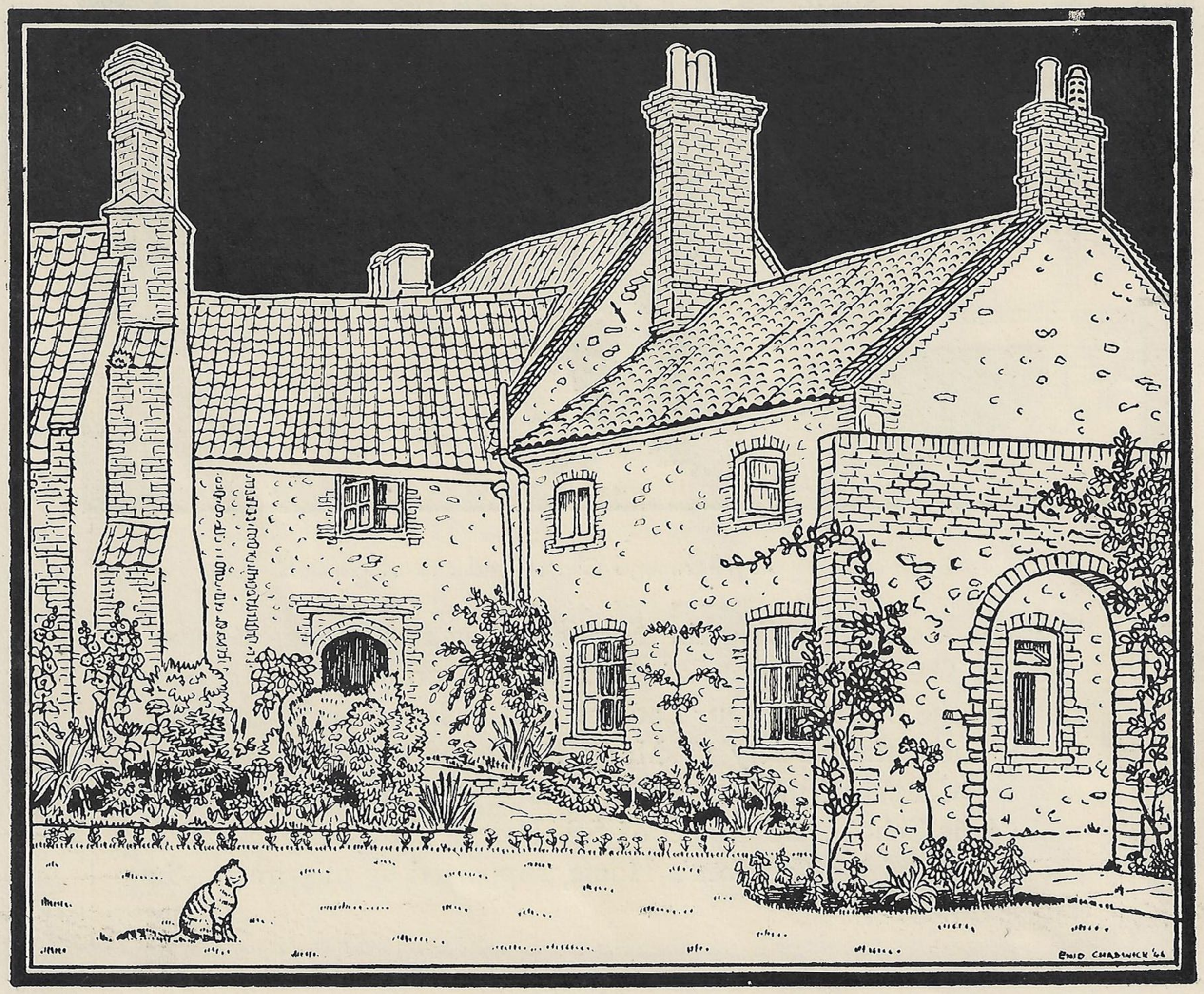
On June 6th, 1938, the new work was blessed by the Right Reverend Bishop O'Rorke, one of the Guardians of the Shrine, in the presence of his Grace Archbishop Nestor and other Orthodox Prelates and Clergy. Between four and six thousand pilgrims and visitors assisted at these functions, including over a hundred and fifty Priests of our Communion. Again on this occasion a great procession which took over an hour to pass wended its way from the Parish Church through the ancient streets of the village to the Shrine, and all day long pilgrims and visitors surged through the Holy House and down to the well.

South side of the Pilgrimage Church and site of cloisters.

The chapels surrounding the Shrine belong to various Societies, such as The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, the Catholic League, the Society of Our Lady of Walsingham, the Seven Years Association, the Society of Mary, Scouts and Guides, which is also the Chapel of the Sanctuary School—the Shrine preparatory and Choir School, the Chapel of SS. Helena and Hilary, which is the oratory of the Children's Home, supported by pilgrims to the Holy House.

On Whit-Monday, 1944, Bishop Sava of Grodno in the presence of a large concourse of pilgrims consecrated the Orthodox Chapel of the Theotokos in the new Church, so that the Divine Liturgy could be offered there, and since then it has been attended by Russian, Polish, Roumanian and Serbian pilgrims.

So that at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham rebuilt on the site of the original Sanctuary set up in the eleventh century at the request of Our Lady herself, East and West meet in their common devotion to the Mother of God.



DRAWINGS

p. 6. *S. Gabriel in the Parish Church of S. Mary.*

p. 9. *The Seven Sacrament font in S. Mary's.*

„ *S. Anthony in St. Mary's.*

p. 14. *View from old Sacristy with garden before enlargement of the Church.*

p. 23. *Feretory of S. Vincent D.M. in the Shrine.*

p. 25. *S. Joseph pray for us.*

p. 29. *The Hatcham Crucifix in the Walled Garden.*

„ *The old Shrine of the Little Flower in the Garden.*

p. 35. *Mater Dolorosa in Chapel of our Lady of Sorrows (IV Station).*

„ *In precincts of the Priest's College.*

p. 36. *S. Cure d Ars. in Chapel of Priest Associates.*

OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM PRAY FOR US